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SOMALIA ON THE HORN

A Counterpoint of Problems Confronting One of Africa's New Nations

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Part VII: Theme and Variations

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When independence comes to Somalia (in July 1960), that long California-shaped territory on the Horn of East Africa, it will be a political event of a kind that has become almost a commonplace in the underdeveloped regions of the world. Since the end of World War II, nearly two-score countries that were dependent areas, and jewels of varying brightness in the imperial crowns of Europe and America, have become independent. They have been welcomed into membership in the United Nations, have joined most of the international organizations, have exchanged ambassadors with other new as well as older nations, have established various symbolic national agencies such as armies, airlines, and x-year development plans, and almost invariably have become recipients of varying amounts of multilateral assistance and American military and economic aid. They have, in a sense, put on the blue-serge jacket and long trousers that marked the end of childhood in the American scene of 40 years ago. No matter if the new suit fits awkwardly, the wearers are entered into an international "fraternity rush"--subjected

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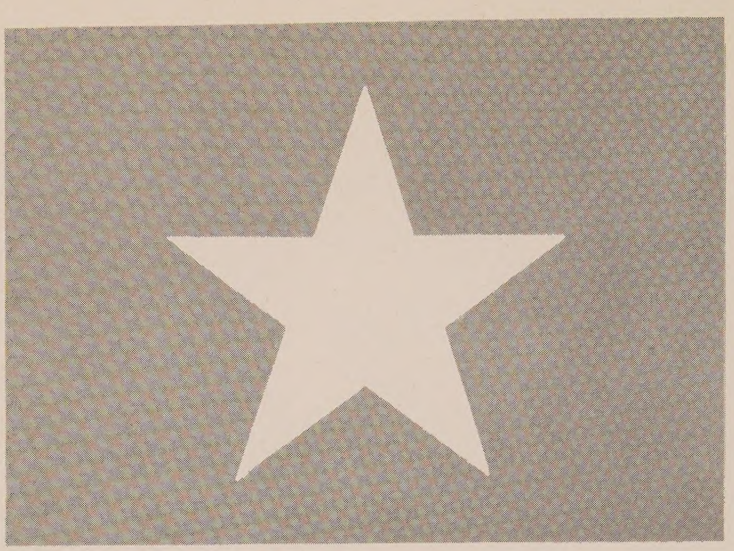

Somalia's Flag: A white star of unity on a light blue field of peace (it is almost identical with the proposed banner of the Congo).

to ideological pressures and ultimately pledged either to the ways of liberal democracy or to an illiberal, materialistic alternative. Human history permits neither a third alternative nor escape.

Somalia, no less than Nigeria, Ghana, or their Asian and Middle Eastern classmates, seems symbolic as a new nation-state of an even more epic process of human development. Historically, the abrupt end of 19th-century imperialism in the face of new nationalisms arising (among an elite, at least) in former colonial areas has its own epic aspects. But if it is fitted into a cosmic frame of the whole development of man as a thinking being, it takes on less notable and more manageable dimensions even though it presents our present political generation with the necessity for finding answers to structural and ethical problems of major importance. Grandly, but in the timeless stream:

> "The general gathering together in which, by correlated actions of the without and the within of the earth, the totality of thinking units and thinking forces are engaged--the aggregation in a single bloc of a mankind whose fragments weld together and interpenetrate before our eyes in spite of (indeed in proportion to) their efforts to separate--all this becomes intelligible from top to bottom as soon as we perceive the natural processus of organization which has never varied since those remote ages when our planet was young."[1]

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[1] Tielhard de Chardin, Père Pierre. The Phenomenon of Man. Harper & Brothers, New York, 1959. The author was a remarkable French Jesuit paleontologist and a Christian humanist (with views the Vatican could not authorize) whose equation: Evolution=Rise of consciousness=Effect of union, is the essence of his "mega-synthesis."

So wrote the thoughtful Père Tielhard de Chardin, whose theory of a progressive psychosocial evolution may be more useful in comprehending the seemingly explosive aspects of African contemporary history than the imperfect instruments of much social science. However, this thinker's approach is not so cosmic as to deny the difficulties of progression: ". . . for our mind to adjust itself to lines and horizons beyond measure, it must renounce the comfort of familiar narrowness. It must create a new equilibrium that had formerly been so neatly arranged in its small inner world," he says.

Contemplated in its relationship to the full historic sweep of human affairs, the emergence of an independent Somalia falls within an epic theme of man's development. There is an inevitability about this enrobement of native tribalism (in Somalia's case) with statehood. That it is stitched together by a thread of nationalism inherited from the previously spun nationalisms of 19th-century Europe may be true, but stimulated by its inheritance, it is only a part of Père Tielhard's "natural processus of organization." Moreover, the transportation and communication revolution of the 20th century has speeded the process.

To suggest that Somalia's independence is but a chord or two in an orchestration that inevitably will be played to its conclusion may seem to be restatement of the obvious (stated better elsewhere). But there is more. It follows that Europe in passing a nationalistic heritage[2] to Africa as an ethic is not left with an empty or anachronistic politique. Indeed, there are ample beginning regionalisms of modern Europe (structural concepts of the Atlantic Community, continental parliaments, common declarations of human rights, and a score or more of more everyday commonalities) are a counterpoint to the theme of African and Asian nationalisms. That the totality of these new European structures is presently without a defined ethic (no modern Ranke, Meinecke, or Mazzini having recognizably come forward yet) detracts in no wise from its increasing effectiveness on itself and on underdeveloped areas. In a general way, while modern structures of a unifying Europe may have been stimulated by the early postwar fear of Soviet infiltration and subversion, it seems logical (since peoples cannot live by fear alone) that the continuing process of integration will be a response to the newer nationalisms of the underdeveloped areas.

A nationalistic ethic is not by its nature ignoble and need not be rejected by a progressive Europe; it is, after all, a concept of unity superimposed upon community, as the community is a collective of families. It can be, as it once was in Germany, a Kulturnationalismus in which liberal thought prospers; and so also can be a European supernationalism, based more on an increasing industrial homogeneity than on mystical elements and sheer power of the kind that marked the Roman and Carolingian integration. The embourgeoisiement of Europe demands a new continental ethic, a new inner concept.

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[2] In which America, its great branch, must be included at this point if not always foreseeably in the future.

In the end it may be possible for the peoples of the sovereign states of Europe to accept regionalism as being intellectually logical, emotionally satisfying, and better suited to the needs of the historical present than is the moribund 19th-century imperialism.

At this moment, in a hard view perhaps, the change that seems in process is so far structural only. Somalia, and Africa, will be confronted not with the anachronisms of 19th-century national competition but with the cultural and industrial regionalism of Europe. This will not quite be the colonialism of a Lord Kitchener who "regarded British imperialism as the creed of a nation, and not of any party or class," but whose "splendid achievement" as a fervent imperialist was founded upon an ". . . imperialism dependent upon a willing and united acceptance of responsibility on the one side, and of subordination on the other."[3] Kitchener, Magnus points out in his useful biography, was "a realist, [and] understood better than many of his contemporaries the strength of the economic motive by which, in one of its principal aspects, British imperialism was inspired. Great Britain was steadily losing the lead she had gained over her rivals during the early decades of the industrial revolution; and the growing wealth, population and armaments of the other great powers threatened her supremacy and security. The once despised overseas empire offered a means of restoring the balance."

Africa, with Europe in geographic proportion (inset).

Nor was the United States free in those decades of the 19th century from similar pressures: "The case for annexing the whole archipelago (of the Philippines) was vigorously presented by expansionist politicians of both parties, and by two overlapping groups of citizens, commanding influential spokesmen and publications. Expansion in the Pacific was the aspiration of businessmen who . . . looked toward the markets of the Orient. It was the prayer of churchmen who . . . desired to spread the gospel of salvation."[4]

Imperialism in this dress of nationalistic hue is dead today, its name an ugly, emotive word in international parlance. Far from dead are the urgent

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[3] Magnus, Sir Philip M. Kitchener: Portrait of an Imperialist. E. P. Dutton, New York, 1959.

[4] Leech, Margaret. In the Days of McKinley. Harper & Brothers, New York, 1959.

economic and security requirements that gave rise to imperialism, but the progress of democracy in national and supernational frames has created the need for a new ethical approach to the solution of problems that have remained more or less constant. Nationalisms of Europe may be dying (perhaps only just beginning a long agony), victims of economic realities and overcome by an undergrowth of social development and communications devices that break down the rigidities and isolation on which older nationalisms were based. These are the changes apparent in the developed world; and the now recognized nationalisms are the mark of changes in process in the underdeveloped areas. The heat and friction incidental to many of these changes should not be permitted to distort the reality of the relationships: Africa is essential to the well-being of Europe (and America); Europe is equally essential to the growth of Africa and other underdeveloped areas as well.

Moreover, these structural changes do not bring the two into better balance. Independence for Somalia (as we have seen) rather intensifies the disproportion, at least temporarily. If we grant the elite in Somalia the ability of taking the territory up the ladder of civilization (as the Western world views this), and that this must be credited a gain in man's development, it should also be granted that an integrating Europe also represents, for argument's sake, a proportionate gain. Hence, while "subordination" is as ugly a word as "imperialism" there does remain a power ratio little changed from the previous century, exemplified not only by military power but also by the continuing weakness of these primary economic producers in the face of the industrialized consumers, and by the rate at which each can educate itself to further growth. In Somalia, the banana is in opposition to the complex of the automobile industry in Europe; but this is by no means the total of the disparity.

Where are we in Père Tielhard's "processus"? Has Somalia gained anything in reality by achieving independence and leaving the comforts "of familiar narrowness" so that it is forced to seek a new equilibrium? In the first place, it had no choice, history is inexorable. Secondly, if the paleontologist's argument holds, it is a move toward a rise of consciousness that leads ultimately to unity, but it is not the end, only a rung on the ladder. Stage by stage, in this view, there is an inevitable "processus," but it does not deny the aberrations that can occur betweentimes.

Tactically, in this period, Somalia will have its serious problems: financial, political, religious, territorial--a complete catalogue of internal and

external difficulties that are inescapable and for which it is less naturally prepared than many of its classmates in the graduating body of this century (although in some respects it may be luckier, anthropologically speaking). Among other states, it is a junior, a fact that no amount of formal recognition can deny, nor voting privileges in the United Nations change. It retains a subordinate position, however unmentionable that status may be. As a national entity it is as vulnerable to a number of direct dangers as it was before the Portuguese first passed the Incense Coast.

It is vulnerable to internal disintegration, although there may be adequate innate defenses against this in persisting tribal consciousness. It is vulnerable to the wooing of antiliberal forces that seek to conquer Africa with the blandishments of materialism, incorporating all within a Communist system. Its defenses here are by association with the only alternative, the Western world. But this admits still another danger: that of a new imperialism by a united Europe, or of a Western world of which the United States is the main protagonist. Its defenses here are hardly centered in Mogadiscio, its capital, nor in some African regionalism or Afro-Asian system for which no physical nor even social basis yet exists. Its defenses in this ultimate case are likely to be found only in the growing liberal democracy that hopefully, at least, is the principal ingredient of unity in the West.

Curiously perhaps, in consideration of all the tactical measures of diplomacy with which Somalia and the West may for the moment be bemused, the coming independence of this African country relates to a rather epic development of liberal unity among all men. Tactics and immediate motives have a way of falling within the frame of inescapable evolving processes, as the nations of the West, and particularly the United States in its effort to carry out its leadership role, act in behalf of their remaining nationalistic interests. In line are the American "commercial" transactions with new nations for mili-

tary bases in return for military aid programs, as in Ethiopia and Libya; the more helpful economic and technical assistance programs; the efforts to broaden the multilateral base of similar programs in the United Nations complex and through efforts of the Atlantic nations, as in the recent Dillon mission to Europe. Such are the tools we have for use in our time to fill the structures we have created in response to the "processus" with liberal meaning. Ultimately, we may all be equal, and the dangers will fade away for Somalia and for ourselves. In the meantime, the cosmic theme will have many variations on the Horn of Africa.